



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

Office of Communications • Mark Dallas Loeffler, Director
1700 N. Congress Ave. • Austin, Tx 78701-1495 • 512-463-5339 • Fax: 512-475-1415

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 14, 2005

Contact: Jim Suydam

(512) 463-5339

(512) 417-5382 cell

Alfredo Gonzalez Texas State Veterans Home ready for business

Valley's first veterans home will have 160 beds for area veterans

MCALLEN — Generations of veterans from the Rio Grande Valley gathered today for a Flag Day dedication of the Alfredo Gonzalez Texas State Veterans Home in McAllen.

“So many from the Valley have fought for our country that we couldn’t think of a better place to build a home designed expressly for veterans,” said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office and Chairman of the Veterans Land Board. “This home is where we, as Texans, may serve those who have given so much.”

Patterson was joined at the dedication by Dolia Gonzalez, mother of Alfredo Gonzalez, as well as area elected officials including U.S. Rep. Ruben Hinojosa, state senators Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa and Eddie Lucio Jr., state representatives Ismael “Kino” Flores, Veronica Gonzales, Armando “Mando” Martinez, Aaron Peña and McAllen Mayor Leo Montalvo.

In September 2002, the City of McAllen proposed a 12-acre tract located at Yuma Avenue and South Cynthia Street as the site for a Texas State Veterans Home. It was one of only two sites selected out of 40 proposals from around the state.

The McAllen home is one of the first to be constructed during Patterson’s term as Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office, and Chairman of the Texas Veterans Land Board.

“The day after I was sworn into office, we selected McAllen for a home. It was my first order of business,” he said. “This home is something the Texas Veterans Land Board is proud to have brought to McAllen. This is a community that has shown overwhelming support for a Texas State Veterans Home.”

The McAllen home is named after U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Alfredo “Freddy” Gonzalez, who was killed in action in Vietnam.

“Sergeant Gonzalez is a true hero,” said Patterson, a former Marine and Vietnam veteran. “His story is remarkable. He rose from humble roots in South Texas to distinguish himself in combat and receive our nation’s highest commendation. It is very appropriate this home will pay tribute to his memory. We can all be proud that Texas veterans fighting for freedom today might

-more-

someday reside in a home named after this Texas hero.”

Sgt. Gonzalez was born and raised in Edinburg, where he played for his high school football team and helped his mother by working in the fields in summertime. He went on to enlist in the Marine Corps, and served a tour of duty in Vietnam. After returning from Southeast Asia, Sgt. Gonzalez became a combat instructor for Marines going to Vietnam. After learning that some of the men he trained were killed in Vietnam, he volunteered for another tour there.

On Jan. 31, 1968, Sgt. Gonzalez was commanding Third Platoon, Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division. His platoon was under fire near Hue City when a Marine was wounded and lay helpless in an exposed position. Sgt. Gonzalez dodged intense enemy fire to rescue the man, and despite being wounded in the process, carried his fellow Marine to safety. Returning to the fight, Sgt. Gonzalez found his company pinned down by fire from a fortified machine gun bunker. He attacked the bunker with hand grenades and destroyed it. On Feb. 3, despite being wounded again, Sgt. Gonzalez refused medical treatment and continued leading his men. The next day, his company was again pinned down, suffering heavy casualties. Sgt. Gonzalez knocked out a heavily fortified enemy position with antitank rockets and gave his life in the process. He was 21 years old.

On Oct. 31, 1969, President Richard M. Nixon presented the Medal of Honor posthumously to Sgt. Gonzalez for his heroism, courage and dynamic leadership.

The Texas State Veterans Home in McAllen will help the Texas Veterans Land Board serve the more than 600,000 Texas veterans age 65 and over. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, there are an estimated 16,000 veterans over 65 who will be able to take advantage of the many amenities the home will provide.

For example, the McAllen home will have 160 beds, of which 60 will be certified for Alzheimer’s care in a separate and secured unit. There are no nursing homes in the Valley with certified Alzheimer’s-care beds, and more than 2,300 of the Valley’s 44,000 veterans are thought to have the disease. There is a critical need for this service in the Valley area. For this reason, the McAllen home will have about twice the average number of Alzheimer’s-care beds as other Texas State Veterans Homes had originally.

Because the VA subsidizes a significant portion of a veteran’s cost to stay in a Texas State Veterans Home, the daily out-of-pocket rates are well below market average and include the cost of medications. A veteran currently pays \$63-\$74 a day for a semi-private room in a Texas State Veterans Home. The average cost for a semi-private room in a private Texas nursing home is about \$109 a day, which often doesn’t include the cost of medications.

Spouses of Texas veterans and Gold Star parents are also eligible for care in Texas State Veterans Homes.

The McAllen home — which opens later this month — will eventually employ about 150 full-time employees, including registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses, therapists, nurses’ aides, laundry and housekeeping staff, activities aides, cooks and dietary staff. The home will have a positive impact on the McAllen-area economy, paying more than \$3 million in new salaries once it is fully staffed.

-more-

Like all Veterans Land Board programs, Texas State Veterans Homes are self-supporting and cost Texas taxpayers virtually nothing.

The Alfredo Gonzalez Texas State Veterans Home joins existing homes in Big Spring, Floresville, Bonham and Temple. A new home is also set to open in El Paso next month. Each home provides skilled, long-term nursing care, comprehensive rehabilitation programs, special diets, recreational activities, social services, a library, and a certified, secured Alzheimer's unit with its own secured outdoor courtyard.

For additional information on Texas State Veterans Homes and special home, land and home improvement loans for Texas veterans, call 1-800-252-VETS (1-800-252-8387), or visit the VLB Web site at www.texasveterans.com. An event Web page is also available for photos and video from the groundbreaking ceremony at www.glo.state.tx.us/mcallen.

###